

Libris Mortis, Part One

By Keith Baker



This installment of *Eberron Expanded* focuses on adapting the material from [Libris Mortis: The Book of Undead](#) for use in an **Eberron** campaign. From the Queen of the Dead to the skeletal armies of Karrnath, undead have always played a critical role in Eberron. *Libris Mortis* presents new information on the physiology and psychology of undead, plus a host of spells, feats, and prestige classes for both undead and those who battle them. This two-part article discusses ways to give this material an Eberron-specific twist.

Necromancers of the Modern Age

Outside of Karrnath, magic involving negative energy and the undead is often treated with suspicion. Few people care about minor necromantic spells such as *fear* and *ray of enfeeblement*, but a wizard with a zombie companion or an undead graft is likely to earn an unfriendly reaction in most of Khorvaire's nations. As a result, many of Eberron's greatest necromancers prefer to work in isolation. Some draw on the Shadow and the Keeper for inspiration, thereby further tainting the magic in the eyes of the public. Others approach the topic from an agnostic perspective, viewing necromantic magic as a way of channeling and shaping the negative energy that flows from the heart of Mabar.

One organization that fully embraces necromancy is the Blood of Vol. Though currently out of favor with the Karrnathi throne, the Blood of Vol boasts many followers in both Karrnath and the Lhazaar Principalities, and it is the primary source of necromantic magic in present-day Eberron. But what magic is available to the followers of the Blood? Are the entire contents of *Libris Mortis* at the disposal of an agent of this organization? Did pale masters serve in the armies of Karrnath?



In a long-running campaign, the sudden introduction of a whole new set of spells raises many difficult questions. For example, why didn't Vol use encysting magic the last time anyone fought her? Furthermore, many of the options outlined in *Libris Mortis* could have a significant impact on the balance of power in the world. As dangerous as an army of Karrnathi skeletons is, one created by a necromancer with the Corpsecrafter and Destruction Retribution feats would be far worse.

The decision to add material is always up to you as DM, but how you choose to accomplish the task can make the difference between endless questions and a seamless integration. In particular, elements from *Libris Mortis* can be much more interesting if they are added organically. Suppose Erandis d'Vol possesses a few of the secrets described in *Libris Mortis* that she shares with her inner circle, and that a few high-level members of the Blood of Vol have undead grafts or the ability to cast *blade of pain and fear*. But Karrnath doesn't yet have

corpsecrafters or true necromancers. In such a model, a PC could be the first person in the modern age to master a spell from *Libris Mortis*. Alternatively, the introduction of much of this material could be a consequence of the party's failure in an adventure. For example, suppose the party stopped Vol from destroying the world but allowed her to escape with the *Qabalin Codex*. The next time the party clashes with the Emerald Claw, her ghouls have new spells and levels of lurking terror.

Limiting the spell knowledge of wizards is a simple task, but what about clerics? A cleric can normally cast any divine spell of a given level, so how does he "learn" new spells that are introduced? And what about Charisma-based arcane casters? What determines when a sorcerer is qualified to add *ghoul gauntlet* to his spell list? The possibilities are infinite, but the options outlined below are good places to start.

- Even though a cleric need not have the same academic understanding of a spell as a wizard does, he must still comprehend its basic nature. Even divine spells have components, and knowledge of a verbal component is not automatic. The Song of the Keeper is a rare, holy text of the Dark Six that teaches clerics the words and gestures needed to cast *consumptive field*. Unlike a wizard, a cleric needs to read the book only once to learn the spells, but he does need the book to set him on the path.
- The character may have to undergo some type of ritual before he is capable of casting a certain spell. Any cleric can ask the Shadow for *energy ebb*, but it will grant the spell only to a priest who has shed his blood on the basalt altar of Qalatesh. This concept works just as well for sorcerers as it does for clerics -- if a sorcerer wants to learn the spell, he must perform the required ritual sometime before he reaches the required level. The same process is also appropriate for feats. If you as DM want to allow a feat such as Necropotent in the game but need to explain why everyone doesn't have it, you can say that a PC has to drink the blood of a vampire before he can take it.
- Mortals cannot ask for the spell -- it must be granted by a deity, powerful outsider, or ancient undead being. This model also lets you highlight the significance of a PC or a particularly important NPC -- the character may be the only person in the modern age who can cast a particular spell or take a special feat.

Ancient Masters of Necromancy

So where does Erandis d'Vol go to learn new necromantic techniques? If she doesn't know the arts of the corpsecrafter, who does? Here are a few ideas with which you can build a rationale.

Khyber's Children

The most terrifying powers in Eberron are the overlords of the Age of Demons: the first children of Khyber. Each of these spirits rivals the deities of other settings in sheer power -- and even while imprisoned, they can touch the world through dreams and the actions of their servants.

The overlord Katashka possesses power over death. In the ancient battle against the dragons, Katashka raised a host of horrors, and those that survived the war are now the oldest undead creatures in existence. Katashka was imprisoned at the end of that conflict, but a number of his rakshasa servants still remain at large among the Lords of Dust. At the DM's discretion, these malefic spirits may have any of the new sorcerer/wizard spells presented in *Libris Mortis*, or possibly even levels in the pale master prestige class. A wizard can learn this magic by dealing with the rakshasas, but what price will he have to pay?

Katashka is not truly a god, so he cannot grant spells. However, he can guide the thoughts of those who worship him and help them to draw dark magic from the heart of Khyber itself. Death cults have appeared throughout

history -- the Dhakaani records speak of a sect of necromancers wiped out by a powerful emperor, and several stories of human death cults predate the rise of Galifar.

Katashka's cultists gain access to the Deathbound, Undeath, and Evil domains. In addition, people born in the vicinity of his prison may be further touched by his darkness. It's up to you as DM to decide exactly where he is buried, but this concept forms a good basis for the Tomb-Tainted Soul feats.

Any of the gods presented in *Libris Mortis* could be adapted as overlords of the first age, though that status represents a step down for most of them. Doresain would be an especially appropriate choice -- a party exploring a ruin from the Age of Demons could be surprised by zakyas with the powers of gravetouched ghouls!

The Qabalrin

The first mortals to delve into the necromantic arts were some elves collectively known as the Qabalrin, who lived in isolation in Xen'drik. Legends claim that the Qabalrin learned the secrets of magic from the Shadow itself. Whether this tale is truth or hyperbole, the Qabalrin certainly possessed incredible skill. They are said to have created the first humanoid vampires, and a number of their greatest citizens reputedly became vampires -- only to be trapped and entombed after a feud that erupted between rival schools. The city of the Qabalrin was later destroyed by the fall of a massive dragonshard, an event that the giants claimed was the result of divine wrath.

Some believe that the traditions of the line of Vol (which in turn formed the foundation of the Blood of Vol) were drawn from Qabalrin teachings. But even if that assertion is true, most of the Qabalrin's secrets remain hidden in the ruins of the Ring of Storms. Their greatest treasure, however, is the knowledge that remains in the minds of the ancient vampires who are still buried beneath the ruins of their once-great city.

Virtually any sort of necromantic knowledge could be attributed to the Qabalrin. These elves certainly knew how to create undead grafts, and some of them probably became pale masters, masters of shrouds, and true necromancers. Rare spells might still be found in Qabalrin vaults, and knowledge recovered from their ruins could provide a character with access to feats such as Corpsecrafter or Necromantic Presence.

On the other hand, the knowledge of the Qabalrin is as valuable to the undead as it is to the living. Thus, you could rule that certain monstrous feats can be gained only through the use of Qabalrin rituals. So if Erandis d'Vol wants to take Contagious Paralysis, she must first explore Xen'drik. Or perhaps the secrets of the master vampire prestige class are known only to the entombed lords of the Qabalrin. But these ancient vampires are creatures of epic power, and their release could have terrible consequences for Eberron.

The clerics of the Qabalrin drew directly on the power of Mabar, though some chose to personify it through the lens of the Shadow. A cleric who recovers the texts of the Qabalrin and chooses to follow this path could gain access to the Deathbound, Evil, Magic, and Undeath domains.

At your discretion, the followers of the Evening Glory could have been a subsect within the Qabalrin. In that model, the Evening Glory herself could have been one of the first Qabalrin vampires, whose motives were less malevolent than those of her comrades. While she would not possess divine rank and could not personally grant spells, she could still serve as a spiritual focus for a religion.

The Closed Circle

The In the early days of Galifar, three wizards' circles took shape in the southern kingdom: the Esoteric Order of Aureon, the Guild of Starlight and Shadows, and the Closed Circle. The wizards of the Closed Circle specialized in transmutation, conjuration, and necromancy, and they sought to unlock the secrets of the daelkyr and the Qabalrin, as well as the power of the Dragon Below. In 641 YK, the Closed Circle was obliterated by the combined force of the Church of the Silver Flame and its two rival circles. But its workshops and mageholds, filled with dark and deadly secrets, may still be hidden across Breland or Darguun.

Erandis d'Vol has thousands of years of tradition to draw upon. So how is it that the ruins of the Closed Circle -- an order that only lasted a few centuries -- can have anything to offer her? The fact that Erandis is drawing upon tradition can serve as an anchor when it comes to innovation. The humans of the Closed Circle were unorthodox and inventive, and their merging of daelkyr techniques with necromancy is an excellent explanation of phenomena such as the Mother Cyst feat and its related spells. So if you want to stage a race to keep the Blood of Vol from gaining new necromantic techniques, you don't have to send adventurers to Xen'drik -- the darkness could be hidden beneath Sharn, in the ruined fortress of the Closed Circle.

The Vampires of the Blood of Vol

The faith of the Blood of Vol is based on the idea that the undead are champions of the church. Worshipers willingly give their blood to vampires to strengthen them in battle. But according to *Libris Mortis*, the greatest force driving a vampire is its inescapable craving for life energy -- a hunger far more lethal to the victim than a little gift of blood. Such a system of sustenance represents a considerable sacrifice on the part of the faithful, and one that would quickly decimate Blood of Vol sects. Thus, vampires associated with the Blood of Vol should have a lesser craving for life energy. While they still require it to survive, the satiation period is 7 days, the Will DC save is 15, and the damage is reduced to 1d4 Wisdom. The simplest solution is to apply this adjustment to all vampires in the setting, but another strain of vampirism could exist if you wish. In that case, only undead whose roots can be traced back to the Qabalrin would have this lesser craving, while those created by Katashka would have an unquenchable thirst.

In the next installment, we'll take a look at the Deathguard, Silver Flame adherents, and other characters who fight the undead, along with a general look at prestige classes, monsters, and other aspects of *Libris Mortis*!

About the Author

Keith Baker has been an avid fan of the **Dungeons & Dragons** game since grade school. His life took a dramatic turn in 2002 when he submitted the World of Eberron to the Wizards of the Coast Fantasy Setting Search. In addition to developing the ***Eberron Campaign Setting*** and *Shadows of the Last War* for Wizards of the Coast, Inc., he has produced material for Atlas Games, Goodman Games, and Green Ronin.

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